

From Middletown to the Olympic Host City

**An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)**

**by**

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A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David E. Sumner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

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## Abstract

Last summer, I had the privilege of participating in Ball State at the Games, an immersive-learning project. Through this project, 40 Ball State students traveled to London to provide behind-the-scenes coverage of the London 2012 Summer Olympic Games. In my thesis, I analyze three long-form stories I wrote during the course of my Ball State at the Games experience and reflect on my personal and professional growth. I also discuss six writing “tools” from Roy Peter Clark’s *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer* and how I incorporated those tools into my long-form stories.

## Acknowledgements

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I would also like to thank Ryan Sparrow for giving me the chance to participate in Ball State at the Games, Colleen Steffen for pushing me to reach my potential during the Olympic Games and Jonathan Batuello for being a great editor and friend.

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## **From Middletown to the Olympic Host City**

Last July, 40 Ball State journalism and telecommunications students traveled to London to provide behind-the-scenes coverage of the 2012 Summer Olympic Games. With the help of seven advisers, they began working on this immersive-learning project in the spring. In the 23 weeks that Ball State at the Games was in operation, the students produced 111 stories, 91 videos, 14 photos and 59 blog posts. Their work was published in The Huffington Post, The Chicago Tribune, USA Today, WTHR (Indianapolis) and more.

I was one of those students. As the features-team leader, I worked with our team adviser, Colleen Steffen, and seven other students to produce athlete profiles, travel pieces, lifestyle features and blogs in London and at home.

In all honesty, the other students and I didn't expect anyone to take Ball State at the Games seriously. Professional media outlets don't send just any reporters to cover the Olympic Games, so why would anyone care about some students trying to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the big shots?

It turns out that quite a few people cared. The first time we realized we were a bigger deal than we knew was in May. We managed to get some press passes to the 2012 Team USA Media Summit in Dallas, and Ryan Sparrow, the professor who started Ball State at the Games, asked me and four sports reporters to go with him and the sports team advisor, Chris Taylor.

Media professionals from all over the country gathered at the Hilton Anatole in downtown Dallas to interview Olympic hopefuls. Not only did I interview dozens of athletes, but I also had the opportunity to network with professionals from The New York Times, Twitter, WTHR-TV (Indianapolis) and more. I even attended press conferences for Michelle Obama and Michael Phelps.

Working next to media professionals who have "been in the biz" for years is incredibly intimidating. But I was able to pull from my knowledge and practice from my time at Ball State. The Media Summit in Dallas felt like an entire internship's worth of experience crammed into three days. And I loved every second of it.

I also learned quite a bit about myself at the Media Summit. Generally speaking, I work well under pressure. It turns out that I'm capable of stepping outside of my comfort zone, which proved to be essential in a competitive environment.

From that point on, Ball State at the Games started taking off. Because journalists our age were such a rarity at an event that scale, professionals at the



Media Summit were talking about “the Ball State group.” We also started to receive a lot of media coverage, which was great PR.

In addition to the coverage and confidence our time in Dallas gave us, we also made important contacts. Standing face to face with the athletes we had been trying to interview gave us an extra edge. We were able to start several stories in Dallas (like my Joseph Diaz Jr. story) and continue them afterward because of the contacts we made.

My trip to England would be the trip of a lifetime, and after Dallas, I was sure I was ready. I left for England in June and spent five and a half weeks studying abroad in Worcester, England, prior to the Games. During this time, I worked on some Ball State at the Games stories, but most of my focus was on taking summer classes and touring England. I was also fortunate to take weekend trips to Scotland and Belgium.

Before I knew it, the Worcester Centre group was leaving, and the rest of the Ball State at the Games crew was arriving. We split up into two teams (the red team and the blue team), and half of us stayed in Worcester while the rest dove headfirst into finding and producing stories in London. Then every three or four days, the teams switched locations. Those who were in London took their interviews and materials back to Worcester to start writing and producing, and those in Worcester went to London to gather components for their stories.

I’ll admit that my first day on my own in London was terrifying. Although we spent the spring semester and the first part of the summer brainstorming ideas, most of the stories the features team produced came from going out and finding them in the city. Prior to this experience, I was used to straightforward class or student media assignments. In London, there were mornings when I had no idea where I’d go or what I’d do; I just knew that I needed to come back with a story (or two). That kind of uncertainty and freedom to find my own stories was probably the most professionally rewarding aspect of the trip for me. I grew as a journalist, and I learned how to step outside of my comfort zone on a whole new level.

I have compiled my three best long-form Ball State at the Games feature stories: “From Olympian to Mayor: Always in the Spotlight,” “Joseph Diaz Jr.: An Olympian’s Fight for a Better Life” and “Pin Trading: An Olympic Subculture.” Each of these stories developed my skills as a journalist and writer in different ways — not to mention the finished products make great portfolio clips.

## **Part 1: The Stories**

### **From Olympian to Mayor: Always in the Spotlight**

When we began the class for Ball State at the Games in the spring, we didn't know what to expect from the immersive-learning project — or where to start. Thankfully, we had Colleen Steffen, our wonderful features-team advisor, to guide us. She suggested that we start with Hoosier Olympians, both past and present. This was a great place to start because we were able to do in-person interviews with many of our sources, and it gave us the chance to try to pitch our stories to local media outlets.

One of the first things I learned was to look for someone or something that's out of the ordinary. Someone in our class said they knew that the mayor of Marion, Ind., had once competed in the Olympic Games. I was interested to meet someone who can compete in athletics on that level, as well as succeed in politics, so I quickly volunteered to cover the story. Another features team member, Sara Schafer, was also assigned to the story and would produce an audio slideshow to go with my text story.

Although it wasn't quite as far as London, this first story involved traveling. It was the first time I had to travel to interview a source (except for when I commuted for my internship the previous summer), but the interview in Marion was only an hour away and was well worth the drive.

Mayor Wayne Seybold competed in pair skating with his sister, Kim, in the 1988 Winter Games. I'll admit that making the drive to meet with someone I had never before met in person was a bit intimidating. As a student journalist, most of my reporting experience had been local. But Sara came with me to videotape the interview, so I had some company. We're also both fairly outgoing, so that worked in our favor as well.

I was pleasantly surprised to learn that Mayor Seybold was more than willing to help with my story. He was patient enough to sit through multiple interviews (it turns out that public figures are used to being interviewed frequently), and he provided contact information for other sources. He even gave me a CD by a Marion musician.

After writing my first draft, Colleen sat down with me to go through several edits. She was patient and meticulous. She pointed out flaws in the story, which sometimes required me to call the mayor again for clarification. I followed every single one of her suggestions, and by the final draft, I had produced something of which I could be proud. My first draft was good, but I knew it could be better, and Colleen helped me reach that potential. From that first long-form story, I knew that Colleen would be very helpful through my Ball State at the Games experience.

Unfortunately, this story was never published, except for on the Ball State at the Games website. But in looking at the big picture, I realize that getting it published wasn't important. I learned a lot from that first story, like traveling to interview a source isn't that big of a deal and that the lede of the story is always the hardest to write. It was also the beginning of a base of content for my Ball State at the Games contributions.

Most importantly, this story was a great place for me to start. A lot of the personal challenges I faced with this endeavor involved stepping outside of my comfort zone. Reporting in a new place is always a little nerve-wracking — not to mention the fact that I would be working in a foreign country during the single largest sporting event in the world. But like anything else, I had to approach this experience with baby steps. Muncie to Marion was a great place to start. Next stop: London.

### **Joseph Diaz Jr.: An Olympian's Fight for a Better Life**

The day after the rest of the Ball State at the Games crew arrived in England, Ryan Sparrow came up to me during breakfast and said, "Remember that Diaz story we talked about? We may need it sooner rather than later." I didn't know it at the time, but this story was going to be my professional highlight of the trip.

I met Joseph Diaz Jr., the youngest boxer on Team USA Boxing, in Dallas. Team USA Boxing isn't one of our country's highest-ranking teams, so there weren't too many reporters swarming around Diaz's table. Diaz was polite and well-mannered. He struck me as a very mature 19-year-old.

From the beginning, I knew Diaz had a great story, and I wanted to tell it. He got into boxing as a means of self-defense, as he often fell victim to bullying throughout his childhood. He also came from a poor home, and his boxing stipend financially supports his immediate family. It was one of those stories that would practically write itself.

Just before the Games began, Ryan asked me to write some story proposals for the Chicago Tribune (our graphics team was already producing graphics for the Tribune). A profile on Diaz was at the top of my list. Unfortunately, we never heard back from the Tribune editor.

We did, however, hear from the Huffington Post. The head of our public relations team was in contact with an editor at the Huff Post who farms out stories to various branches of the publication. Huffington Post Latino Voices had requested a video about Diaz, but they didn't ask for a text story or photos. Ryan thought we could convince them to run a full package, though, so he asked me to go ahead and

get the text story together. That night, I began writing the story based on the interview I did with Diaz in Dallas. Colleen suggested that I write as much as I could and then fill in the holes after more interviews.

Early the next morning, I was off to London. Chris Taylor was able to get us press passes for the Team USA Boxing practice, where several other media professionals would be interviewing the boxers and getting b-roll and photos. Chris, his graduate assistant, a student videographer, a student photographer and I took the train to the practice location before the rest of the Ball State at the Games crew arrived in London.

The boxing practice was like a mini version of the Media Summit in Dallas. But this time, I was more prepared. I didn't have as much of an overwhelming feeling that I was out of place, although I was likely the youngest person (besides a few of the boxers) in the practice room. And unlike in Dallas, I knew exactly what information and what interviews I needed to get. Because I had already written part of the story, I just needed to fill in the gaps and get some secondary interviews.

Before any of the reporters could do interviews with the boxers, they had a "typical" practice so that photographers could get photos and videographers could get b-roll. Because I didn't have to worry about the visual elements of the story, I was able to spend that time taking notes and observing Diaz with his teammates. The room was so hot that reporters (including myself) and photographers took turns standing by the door, hoping to get some cooler air.

When my turn came to interview Diaz, I was more nervous than I thought I would be. This story was a big deal. I knew it had a lot of potential, and I wanted to tell it to the best of my ability. But just like in Dallas, I quickly overcame my hesitation and jumped right into the interview. I was also able to interview one of Diaz's teammates and the head boxing coach while I was there.

Immediately after the practice, I went to the nearest Starbucks and began writing. I was on a tight deadline (we were planning on sending the package that night), and I knew I had to get to work. After I wrote the story, I took it back to Colleen, who had just arrived in London that afternoon. Colleen and her graduate assistant, Jonathan Batuello, then helped me edit the story for several hours. This process was much more rushed and high-pressure than the process of editing my mayor story, but nonetheless, we had it done in time to send to the Huffington Post that night.

After we sent the full package story about Diaz to the Huffington Post, we didn't hear back from them for days. Eventually, I told myself that I needed to put it to the back of my mind and focus on the other stories I was writing. I tried not to get my hopes up about it, but I was definitely disappointed when we didn't hear back from the Huffington Post for a while.

Four days later, the red team and the blue team switched locations, and it was time for me to go back to Worcester. On the way back, our bus stopped at a rest stop for dinner. I was feeling a bit homesick by then (I had been in England for about six weeks), and I was excited to find a KFC at the rest stop.

But later that night, I regretted getting that popcorn chicken. I had food poisoning — bad. I was sick all night and into the next morning. After getting little sleep, I spent most of the next day in bed. It was the worst day of the trip.

That afternoon, our public relations team leader, told me that she finally heard back from the Huffington Post. They were going to run the full package. But after talking myself out of getting my hopes up, I was hesitant to believe it until I saw it for myself.

Sure enough, it was on their website. And just like that, the worst day of my trip had become the best day of my trip. I was overjoyed. Although I was fatigued and still didn't feel well, I jumped up and down in my room with excitement. There's nothing like seeing your first major byline.

Working on the Diaz story taught me what's its like to work under pressure. I completed the story in about a day and a half, and I wasn't even sure that it would run. But it also taught me that media outlets love free content. Because many media outlets couldn't afford to send several reporters to London, we were able to provide them with free content. And although we were just students, we worked hard to make sure the work we were producing was to the best of our ability.

Finally, this story taught me not to overlook the underdogs. It would've been easy for me to walk past Diaz's table in Dallas. But something told me I should stop and talk to him. Maybe it was my journalist intuition. Or maybe it was just luck. But I couldn't be happier that I talked to Diaz that day because it led me to my biggest professional accomplishment thus far.

## **Pin Trading: An Olympic Subculture**

The seed for my next long-form story was planted in Dallas when we learned of an unofficial Olympic "sport." Ball State alumna Vanessa Virbitsky works for the United States Olympic Committee, which hosted the Media Summit in Dallas. She told Ryan that she was collecting Olympic lapel pins to trade in London, and we soon discovered that pin trading is a popular activity at the Games.

I tried to start finding sources for the pin-trading story before the Games started but didn't have much luck. But soon after we arrived in London, other reporters on our team said they saw pin traders around the city. So I set off to find some for my story.

It wasn't long before I hit the pin-trading jackpot. I found one pin trader who was walking around with his pins displayed on his hat. He told me that he wasn't a serious pin trader, but if I walked closer to Olympic Park, I would find the avid traders. When I got to the entrance of the park, I saw that dozens of pin traders had set up stands displaying their collections. Luckily, I had a photographer with me, so she was able to get pictures of each person I interviewed, as well as their impressive collections.

I interviewed five pin traders, each with different reasons for trading (these different reasons later became the structure of my story). By this point in the Games — about a week in — I had hit my stride. I was no longer afraid to approach people on the street. I had spoken to people from all over the world, and my confidence grew with each successful interview and story.

After a full day of reporting, I returned to our London flat. When I saw Ryan that evening, he invited me to go to the zoo with his daughter and a few other students the next day. I knew that my story was due the following day, but I really wanted to go to the zoo. So I began writing. And before I knew it, I had finished a long-form story in one sitting.

I had written plenty of stories in one sitting, but never a 1,000-word story. Although the motivation of going to the zoo definitely helped, I also wanted to continue to push myself. Ball State at the Games gave me my first real deadline-writing experience. This particular story taught me that I'm capable of producing quality work in a short time if I really focus on it, especially if I have some extra motivation.

Like my mayor story, my pin-trading story was never published outside of the Ball State at the Games website. But I was proud of the work I'd done in a short period of time, and this story proved that my skill sets were growing.

## Part 2: The Tools

My experience with Ball State at the Games pushed me to become a better journalist and writer. One of my inspirations for improvement was Roy Peter Clark's *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*. This book provides writing advice and techniques. Below are a few "tools" that exemplify what I learned this summer:

### Tool # 14: Get the name of the dog.

Clark says that "get the name of the dog" is his favorite tool. "Dig for the concrete and specific details that appear to the senses," he writes. This is a skill that I wanted to focus on while in London because I believe that the details are what make or break a story.

Colleen worked with me on getting the details for stories. When she went through my drafts with me, she was not afraid to tell me to go back and get more details. One example of this is from my mayor story. Colleen suggested that I find a video of the mayor and his sister's performance at the Olympic Games so that I could describe it in my article. I was able to find a video on YouTube, and my description added another layer to my story:

*Seybold and his sister's performance was Western-themed, as they wore spandex with tassels and skated to the classic "hoedown" song, "Cowboy Shoot 'Em Up." One of the judges commented, "Their selection of music is very fitting for Calgary."*

*"I don't think I've seen this much excitement in their skating in a long time," another judge said. "They really seem to be on top of it." Seybold and his sister both maintained smiles on their faces through the entirety of their energetic performance. At the end, the same judge commented, "Well, Marion, Ind., you have invested your money well. The people are plenty proud today." Seybold and his sister won 10th place at the 1988 Winter Games.*

By describing what they wore, the song they danced to and how the judges reacted, I was able to help the reader "see" the performance through my writing.

Another example is in my Diaz story. Diaz financially supports his immediate family through the stipend he receives from USA Boxing. So when Diaz found out that he was going to London, his family started fundraising so they could go to London to watch Diaz in the Olympic Games. When Diaz explained this to me, I asked what kind of fundraising they did so that I could incorporate specific details in my story:



*But the stipend was not enough for his parents to come to London and watch him in the Olympic Games. So he and his family washed cars, sold t-shirts and autographs, collected donations and held beer pong tournaments.*

Instead of simply writing that his family raised money, I was able to show the reader how hard Diaz's family worked to go to London and how creative they were without having to explicitly say it. These seemingly small details took my stories to the next level.

### **Tool # 23: Tune your voice.**

To explain "tune your voice," Clark refers to a definition from his friend and colleague Don Fry: "Voice is the sum of all the strategies used by the author to create the allusion that the writer is speaking directly to the reader from the page."

Finding my voice as a writer has always been a challenge. I'm an organized writer, so structure comes easily to me. I'm also attuned to detail, so I picked up on "getting the name of the dog" quickly. But after years of writing papers and essays, my default writing style is formal. I have to concentrate hard to get myself to write in a more casual, compelling style.

Colleen always tells me that I need to "put more Emily" in my writing. She says that I have a dynamic personality and I need to make sure that shows in my stories. I worked hard to do just that with my Diaz piece.

The hardest part of a story to write is always the lede, which is consequently the most important part. I knew that I needed to draw the reader in right away if I was going to get my Diaz story published in the Huffington Post. Colleen and I worked for quite some time on crafting my lede so that it captured the start of Diaz's character development.

*JoJo Diaz grew up as part of a poor family in a rough part of El Monte, Calif. Kids in his neighborhood wanted him to join one of the local gangs, but Diaz liked school. He got good grades. For that reason, and because he was so small, he was bullied a lot.*

*One time he fought back.*

*The fight landed him in a special class for troubled students, and he swore to never fight on the street again. But the bullying didn't stop.*

Working on this lede helped me "tune my voice." I knew that I wanted it to be punchy and dramatic, so I went through several drafts to get it just right.



One of the suggestions for tuning your voice Clark gives is to read stories aloud. This is a technique I used a lot in London. When I'm unsure about a sentence, reading it aloud gives me an idea of how it might sound to a reader. It allows me to momentarily step away from my work and to see my writing from a different perspective.

Even now I struggle with tuning my voice. I know that the more I practice, the closer to "my voice" I'll get. And I certainly had plenty of practice through Ball State at the Games.

### **Tool #25: Learn the difference between reports and stories.**

"Use reports to render information," Clark says. "Use stories to render experience." As a features writer, I am biased toward stories. I recognize the importance of reports, but I would much rather read or write a story.

For each piece I wrote for Ball State at the Games, I tried to tell a story. I've learned that people like to read about people. But I also tried to weave information throughout the stories. In this way, I combined the elements of stories and reports for each of my three long-form articles.

For example, my Diaz article is a story of triumph and of an underdog overcoming obstacles on his way to success. I started the story by telling an anecdote about how Diaz got into boxing:

*JoJo Diaz grew up as part of a poor family in a rough part of El Monte, Calif. Kids in his neighborhood wanted him to join one of the local gangs, but Diaz liked school. He got good grades. For that reason, and because he was so small, he was bullied a lot.*

*One time he fought back.*

*The fight landed him in a special class for troubled students, and he swore to never fight on the street again. But the bullying didn't stop.*

*He turned to his father for advice, and his dad took him to the local boxing gym to learn how to defend himself the right way. The very first day, Diaz ran into one of the bullies from school at the gym. The other boy had two years' experience in the ring.*

*"You think you're tough?" the bully said. "Let's spar."*

*Diaz agreed to spar in a week. During that time he practiced with his father. A week later, he put on his boxing gloves and walked into the ring for his first match. He gave the bully a bloody nose and made him cry. He found his passion in life.*

Another story I told was at the beginning of my major story:

*Every other Thursday, the Republican mayor of Marion, Ind., hosts a local hour-long radio show. Wayne Seybold takes unscreened calls from city citizens concerned about everything from getting potholes fixed to bringing more businesses to Marion.*

*“One morning, I’m on my radio show, and someone is just kind of letting me have it over some things that we’ve been doing,” Seybold said. “And I said, ‘Well sir, I know you’re try to put me in an embarrassing situation, and that’s fine. I mean I used to wear spandex for a living.’”*

Starting articles with anecdotes is the perfect way to draw readers into the rest of the story. I took this idea and decided to break apart my pin traders story into four mini-stories. Each mini-story is about a different pin trader and how he got into trading. Because their stories were all different, I was able to explain pin trading through the unique individuals who participate in this popular Olympic “sport.”

### **Tool #27: Reveal traits of a character**

“Show characteristics through scenes, details and dialogue,” says Clark. In his book, he explains that describing people through adjectives is less effective than “revealing traits of a character” by describing them in great detail and allowing the reader to draw his or her own conclusions.

In my Diaz story, I described a scene in which Diaz was practicing about a week before he competed in the Games:

*Although the center doesn’t have air conditioning, Diaz wore a gray, long-sleeved Nike shirt and black athletic shorts Thursday. After stretching and conditioning, he put on his gloves and started hitting the punching bag. His punches got harder and faster as he progressed, with a “hut” sound each time he hit the bag. Eventually his nice, clean clothes became sweaty. Although several other athletes and coaches were buzzing around him, he looked as focused as if he were alone.*

Instead of saying something like, “Diaz is a hard worker and is determined to reach his goals through practice,” I described Diaz at practice. I observed him and his mannerisms, and this allowed me to paint a picture of a hard-working boxer without having to say that he’s hard working. This taught me that “setting the scene” is a powerful writing technique.

I also used this tool in my pin-trading story. When describing pin trader Leonard Braun, I wanted to capture his fun-loving, slightly mischievous, personality.

*When he trades, he wears a gold medal around his neck that says "100-Meter Freestyle Pin Trading."*

*"It's a sport I invented. That's why I'm the world champion, because I don't let anyone else compete."*

*"I've actually had a lot of fun with this because sometimes athletes will walk up to me because they think it might be real," he said. "And then when they read it, they laugh. And I always say, 'Don't laugh; my sport is just as hard as yours.'"*

Just from this passage, the reader gets a sense of Braun's sense of humor. I was able to capture Braun's personality traits and still allow the readers to come to their own conclusions about Braun.

### **Tool #39: Write toward an ending.**

"Reality is messy, but readers need closure," Clark says. He urges writers to "write toward an ending" so that readers aren't left feeling dissatisfied with the story. Throughout this chapter, Clark provides several techniques for ending a story.

One of the techniques is to "look to the future," or to give the reader some sense of what may come next for the characters if the story is ongoing. This is the technique that I used to end my mayor story. Because the story is profile of the mayor's life, there is not yet an ending. So instead, I offered possibilities for where the mayor may end up next. I also alluded to the headline of the story ("From Olympian to Mayor: Always in the Spotlight") by using the word "spotlight" again:

*Continuing in the spotlight, Seybold's career doesn't seem to be slowing down anytime soon.*

*"Whether he's the mayor of Marion or a congressman from Indiana or working at his ice rinks, I'm not sure which one his future holds," his sister said. "But at this point, we all hope it's the Congressman."*

*Seybold said he knows one day his political career will end too, though, and just like in the past, he's already planning ahead with his business.*

*"I've always kind of lived my life in four-year increments," Seybold said. "You either made the Olympic team or you didn't, and then you have to try for four more years. And now I'm involved in politics, and it's four years, and you try in another four years. So there hasn't seemed to be a lot of longevity there, although we've been able to take those four years and make a pretty good career out of it."*

I also used the “look to the future” technique for my Diaz story. Because Diaz had not yet competed in the Games at the time I wrote the story, the conclusion of the story in real life would be how he did at the Games. So for the sake of ending the story, I told the reader about Diaz’s desired outcome:

*Although USA Boxing hasn’t done well in recent Olympic Games, Diaz said he believes that will change this year. In fact, he has his heart set on gold.*

*“If I bring back that gold medal, I’m going to change my whole family’s life,” he said. “I’m going to buy them a house. I’m going to buy them a car and just pay all their bills for them and everything. So that’s actually making me more focused and more determined.”*

For my pin trading story, I used a technique Clark calls the “apt quote.” This ending uses a quote from a character that sums up the story:

*“If you don’t collect, it’s kind of hard to understand the collector mentality.”*

In reading over my pin trading story and this chapter of Clark’s book, I realize that I could have crafted a better ending for the story. However, I wrote this story in the heat of the Games, so unfortunately, I did not get to spend as much time on it as I did the other two stories.

### **Tool #43: Read for both form and content.**

Clark says that writers must be able to answer this question about each piece they write: “What is it that I’m trying to build in this work, and what tools do I need to build it?” “Reading for both form and content” is one of the most important tools because ensures that writers produce well-rounded, carefully crafted works.

One of the reasons that Colleen and Jonathan made such a great editing team during the Games is that their skill sets complement one another. Colleen tends to see “the big picture” in stories and always makes sure that each story she edits answers all of her questions as a reader. Jonathan, on the other hand, focuses on each individual sentence. He can pick apart a story and point out little flaws that most people would read over. That’s not to say that Colleen isn’t good with sentence structure or that Jonathan doesn’t see “the big picture” in stories, but those are their default editing modes. This was invaluable to me as a writer.

When I was working on my Diaz story, I first had to sit down with Colleen, and my story had to pass her inspection. If she had any questions about “the name of the dog” or any other minute details, I went back through my notes and added to my story until I filled all of the holes she found. Then, I took my story upstairs so that Jonathan could read over it next. He pointed out that too many of my paragraphs

started with similar sentence structures, so I changed some of them around to make them more varied. It was a time-consuming process, but by the end of it, we had transformed my rough draft into quite possibly my best story yet.

After my Diaz story was published in the Huffington Post, I read over it several times to try to detect any changes editors at the Huff Post may have made, but I did not find any. This proved to me that our two-step editing process was effective. I now try to apply that process to each new piece I write. I've found that by "reading for both form and content" separately, I've been able to edit my work in a well-rounded manner.

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It's difficult to explain just how much my experience with Ball State at the Games impacted my professional and personal life. It felt like a test of my skills. After three years of learning about and practicing journalism, I was thrown into the streets of London to see how prepared I was. There were times when I thought I wasn't prepared enough. But in the end, I walked away from the experience of a lifetime with the confidence to dive into the journalism industry.

When I first heard "immersive learning," this catchphrase meant nothing more to me than just that — a catchy marketing technique to appeal to "hands-on" learners. But this summer, I discovered that immersive learning is what sets Ball State apart from other universities. Professors like Ryan Sparrow push the envelope to make sure that students are getting the most of from our education, and I'm forever grateful for that.

I have yet to see how the skills I gained in London will be used in my career, but I know that my portfolio clips from Ball State at the Games have already set me apart from other internship and job applicants. I'm hoping to work outside of the Midwest, and while many of my peers are intimidated by a big move after graduation, the world seems like a much smaller place when you've been to London and back.

## **From Olympian to mayor: Always in the spotlight**

**By Emily Thompson**

Every other Thursday, the Republican mayor of Marion, Ind., hosts a local hour-long radio show. Wayne Seybold takes unscreened calls from city citizens concerned about everything from getting potholes fixed to bringing more businesses to Marion.

“One morning, I’m on my radio show, and someone is just kind of letting me have it over some things that we’ve been doing,” Seybold said. “And I said, ‘Well sir, I know you’re try to put me in an embarrassing situation, and that’s fine. I mean I used to wear spandex for a living.’”

As a 1988 Olympic ice skater, Seybold has had his fair share of spandex costumes. From Olympian to mayor of Marion, he also has a long history of representing his community. Now in his third term, Seybold is Marion’s first three-consecutive-term mayor.

On February 9, Seybold announced that he has decided to run for the 5th District Congressional seat currently held by Dan Burton. Although the jump from Olympic ice-skating to politics seems disjointed, Seybold is a man of many talents—but more importantly, he always thinks two steps ahead in terms of life goals.

### **From the beginning**

Seybold grew up in a single-wide, three-bedroom trailer on the south side of Marion with his sister, Kim, his brother and his parents. As a boy, Seybold was a “normal skinny kid” who was very active and spent all of his free time outdoors. From a young age, he and his sister enjoyed roller-skating at Idyl Wyld Roller Palace in Marion. The hobby stuck, and they began roller-skating in the summer and ice-skating in the winter. Marion didn’t have an ice rink, though, so their parents drove Seybold and his sister to Fort Wayne, Ind., to ice skate most Saturdays.

Once they started getting more competitive with the sport, Seybold and his sister had to choose between roller-skating and ice-skating because of financial and time constraints. They decided to stick with ice-skating, and Seybold and his sister began taking private lessons and training for competitions with what little money his parents could set aside for training.

A young man ice-skating in the ‘80s, Seybold said he didn’t face many gender stereotypes because of his newfound passion.

“We kind of had success right from the beginning, so people kind of viewed it differently than maybe if I were 5, 6, 7, 8 years old figure skating when all the other

kids were playing hockey,” he said. “By the time we switched over [to ice skating], I was 13, so we were already doing lifts and jumps.”

Each week, Seybold, his sister and their mother commuted up to 550 miles to practice.

“My mom would pick us up from school, and then we would drive to Fort Wayne or to Carmel, and we’d usually do our homework in the car,” Seybold said. “Afterwards, we’d go home and have dinner, and half an hour later it’d be time for bed. So that was our day.”

## **Going for Gold**

The year before Seybold and his sister went to the Olympic Games, his parents ran out of money for skating purposes. His father was an insurance adjuster, and his mother, who was a stay-at-home mom until Seybold’s brother went to school, was now a teacher’s aid for special education. Seybold said that they had given up everything for their children to be able to skate, but the costs of training and traveling added up quickly. So the people of Marion came together and raised enough money to support the two skaters for the whole year so that they could fulfill their dream to skate at the Olympic Games.

The Marion high-school vice principal at the time organized much of the fundraising efforts, along with several other Marion residents. They placed fish tanks in classrooms and containers in restaurants to collect donations, firemen went door-to-door selling patches, and volunteers made crafts and sold them. Seybold and his sister were in Delaware training at the time, so they didn’t know much about the fundraising until the town invited the skaters to a high-school basketball game, where they presented Seybold and his sister with a check. Seybold said about 7,500 people came to the game, and many of them had signs that said, “We love Kim and Wayne” and “Good luck Kim and Wayne.”

“It was this huge community-wide effort that took place and ended up being a very successful situation,” Seybold said. “It was a pretty humbling experience to see all that stuff going on in the community.”

In 1982, Seybold and his sister made it to the Junior World Team, and three years later, they moved to Delaware to train full time with Ron Ludington, who coaches at the University of Delaware. Then in 1988, they made it to the Winter Olympic Games on the American pair skating team.

“It just seemed like this unattainable goal,” Seybold said. “There’s not even an ice rink in Marion, and we went to the Olympics in ice skating. That’s a blessed event, as far as I’m concerned.”

Before they knew it, Seybold and his sister had made it to Calgary, Canada, for the games. They competed on days two and three of the 16-day Olympic event, so Seybold and his sister had the rest of the time to be “tourists with a backstage pass.”

“At the Olympic Village, we went through all the opening ceremonies, and that was very cool,” Seybold said. “It just made the hair on your arms stand up. Then the next day, it was time to compete, and it was like any other competition. Here we were at the rink, and we’ve got a job to do.”

Seybold and his sister’s performance was Western-themed, as they wore spandex with tassels and skated to the classic “hoedown” song, “Cowboy Shoot ‘Em Up.” One of the judges commented, “Their selection of music is very fitting for Calgary.”

“I don’t think I’ve seen this much excitement in their skating in a long time,” another judge said. “They really seem to be on top of it.” Seybold and his sister both maintained smiles on their faces through the entirety of their energetic performance. At the end, the same judge commented, “Well, Marion, Ind., you have invested your money well. The people are plenty proud today.” Seybold and his sister won 10<sup>th</sup> place at the 1988 Winter Games.

## **Getting into politics**

After the Olympic Games, they both kept skating. Seybold produced ice shows in Los Angeles that toured around the world, and his sister, now Kim Catron, began coaching. Seybold said that he knew he didn’t want to raise a family in L.A., though, so Seybold and Catron both decided to move back to Indiana.

“So many athletes get so engrossed in what they’re doing with the athletics that they forget there’s got to be another part of your life,” Seybold said. “Our parents always said, ‘Someday you’re not going to skate, and you need to prepare for that time in your life.’”

So when he moved back to Marion, Seybold knew he had to figure out his next step.

“I got back and thought, ‘Wow I want to give some of this knowledge that I’ve gained through traveling and things I’ve seen around other parts of the world to Marion,’” Seybold said. “So I went to the mayor’s office and asked to sit on a couple of boards: the park board and the Main Street Marion board. And then one day [the mayor] called me and said, ‘We’d like you to run for City Council.’”

Before he knew it, Seybold was on the City Council and was considering running for mayor as a Republican candidate.

“When people started talking to him about the possibility of running for mayor, I don’t think he thought he could do it,” said his sister. “But then we he thought about everything that Marion had given him and everything Grant County had given him, I



think he said, 'OK, Well maybe if I win, that's my way of giving back and trying to make the community a better place.'"

So over eight years ago, Seybold ran and was elected as mayor of Marion.

"I was probably more shocked than anybody when he said he was going to go into politics," his sister said. "I was thinking, 'What does he know about politics?' But over the past eight years, I've been pleasantly surprised by how well he's done. I really think he's found his niche in life with politics."

Now in third term as Marion major, Seybold has established quite a few relationships—both political and personal.

"He's an extremely outgoing individual," said Grant County Republican Party Chairman Jerry Shull. "He cares a great deal about community, family and character. I've learned to like him as an individual and respect him a great deal. That relationship has totally evolved from the political arena."

In the political realm, Seybold is known for strong economic development in Grant County, according to Marion's chief of staff, Jonathan Perez.

"Usually mayors are strictly focused on their own city, but Wayne's seen that if he can help put a company in a town four miles away that with the trickle effect, there will be spill-over to help Marion too," Perez said.

Seybold is also known for his busy agenda.

"If he wasn't doing this, he'd be doing a million other things," Perez said. "So he is essentially on the go 24/7. I don't know how he does it. I'm half his age, and I can't do it."

Although skating and politics seemingly have nothing in common, Seybold said his skating career prepared him for his life in politics.

"There was so much that we learned," Seybold said. "So many life lessons: how to travel, how to talk to people that might be in very high positions. We met President Reagan and Nancy Reagan and ambassadors ... All of it has transferred to this job."

Seybold also attributes his work ethic to his skating experiences and his parents.

"[My sister and I] didn't come from a family that had a lot of wealth, so we had to work to help pay for our living expenses when we were in Delaware and some of our skating," Seybold said. "But I think that kept us well-rounded, and it helped us to really understand that skating wasn't everything. At some point, skating is going to end, and you have to have another plan. So if we were to do it all over again, I think we'd do it exactly the same way."

## What's next?

In addition to his mayoral responsibilities, Seybold is also a business owner. Ice Rinks 2 Go, which started as Seybold Skating, provides portable ice rinks in areas that don't have them, like Marion. He is also planning to go back to Indiana Wesleyan University to finish a degree in marketing.

Seybold and his wife, Jennifer, have three sons, who all skate. He even joins them on the ice every now and then.

"People ask, 'Can you do a triple sow cow?'" Seybold said. "'Yeah, one time, but call the ambulance because I'm probably not going to get up.'"

Continuing in the spotlight, Seybold's career doesn't seem to be slowing down anytime soon.

"Whether he's the mayor of Marion or a congressman from Indiana or working at his ice rinks, I'm not sure which one his future holds," his sister said. "But at this point, we all hope it's the Congressman."

Seybold said he knows one day his political career will end too, though, and just like in the past, he's already planning ahead with his business.

"I've always kind of lived my life in four-year increments," Seybold said. "You either made the Olympic team or you didn't, and then you have to try for four more years. And now I'm involved in politics, and it's four years, and you try in another four years. So there hasn't seemed to be a lot of longevity there, although we've been able to take those four years and make a pretty good career out of it."

## Joseph Diaz Jr.: An Olympian's fight for a better life

By Emily Thompson

JoJo Diaz grew up as part of a poor family in a rough part of El Monte, Calif. Kids in his neighborhood wanted him to join one of the local gangs, but Diaz liked school. He got good grades. For that reason, and because he was so small, he was bullied a lot.

One time he fought back.

The fight landed him in a special class for troubled students, and he swore to never fight on the street again. But the bullying didn't stop.

He turned to his father for advice, and his dad took him to the local boxing gym to learn how to defend himself the right way. The very first day, Diaz ran into one of the bullies from school at the gym. The other boy had two years experience in the ring.

"You think you're tough?" the bully said. "Let's spar."

Diaz agreed to spar in a week. During that time he practiced with his father. A week later, he put on his boxing gloves and walked into the ring for his first match. He gave the bully a bloody nose and made him cry. He found his passion in life.

"Ever since then, I just got hooked on boxing," he said. "And I said, 'Dad, we could do this for a living.'"

Joseph "JoJo" Diaz Jr. is now the youngest boxer on Team USA for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games. USA Boxing gives him a monthly stipend, which supports Diaz, one of his sisters and his two unemployed parents.

"If it wasn't for boxing, I don't know where I'd be," he said. "I don't know if I'd be in a gang or what. But boxing really helps me out a lot, with everything: helping out my parents financially, helping me stay out of trouble, everything overall."

But the stipend was not enough for his parents to come to London and watch him in the Olympic Games. So he and his family washed cars, sold t-shirts and autographs, collected donations and held beer pong tournaments.

After what seemed like endless fundraising, they raised enough money to bring seven people to watch him: his mother and father, his two sisters and brother-in-laws and his boxing director. They met Diaz in London last week.

Another person in his corner is fellow Olympic boxer Marcus Browne. The two spend a lot of time together outside of the ring.

“JoJo’s my boy,” Browne said. “He’s a great kid. If I would have a son, I want my son to be like him because he’s well mannered. He’s just a good-spirited person.”

Since arriving in London, Diaz said he’s ready to compete.

“I’m already here,” he said. “I’m already really well trained. I’m already focused. I’m in the best shape of my life. So I know that it’s going to be really hard to beat me.”

He and the rest of Team USA Boxing are preparing for the Games at the SCORE Training Center in London. At a typical practice, the team trains with four coaches.

Although the center doesn’t have air conditioning, Diaz wore a gray, long-sleeved Nike shirt and black athletic shorts Thursday. After stretching and conditioning, he put on his gloves and started hitting the punching bag. His punches got harder and faster as he progressed, with a “hut” sound each time he hit the bag. Eventually his nice, clean clothes became sweaty. Although several other athletes and coaches were buzzing around him, he looked as focused as if he were alone.

Al Mitchell, Team USA head boxing coach, said he’s confident in Diaz’s skills.

“He’s a very smart young man, and he wants to learn,” Mitchell said. “He’s just getting better and better each day. When he came here, he could box. And he’s working on strategy now.”

Although USA Boxing hasn’t done well in recent Olympic Games, Diaz said he believes that will change this year. In fact, he has his heart set on gold.

“If I bring back that gold medal, I’m going to change my whole family’s life,” he said. “I’m going to buy them a house. I’m going to buy them a car and just pay all their bills for them and everything. So that’s actually making me more focused and more determined.”

## **Pin trading: An Olympic subculture**

**By Emily Thompson**

Most people come to the Olympic Games for sports. Athletes, coaches, families of athletes, journalists and spectators all make the pilgrimage because of their love for athletics.

But behind this image of the Games exists a subculture of Olympic attendees with ulterior motives.

“Pin trading is the largest non-athletic event at the Games,” trader John Dyck said.

Avid traders travel to each Olympic host city to collect lapel pins from different committees, sports and organizations. Many are members of clubs, like Olympin, the oldest active pin-trading club.

But even those who come to the Games for pin trading do it for different reasons.

### **Some trade because that’s the only way to get certain pins**

John Dyck got his start at Expo ’86, a World’s Fair in his hometown, Vancouver, Canada. He saw kiosks with pins for sale and started asking about them.

“I found out there are some pins you can only get by trading,” he said. “Therein lies the challenge.”

London 2012 marks his fourth Olympic Games, and he plans to go to Sochi, Russia, in 2014 for the Winter Olympic Games. Dyck is also a member of both Olympin and Pacific Pin Club, which is based in Vancouver.

He has amassed approximately 12,000 pins total.

But before he reached this level of success, he had to learn the ropes of pin trading. For example, a rule of thumb in pin trading is that participants only display pins they’re willing to trade.

“I never have a pin out that I’m not willing to let go of,” he said. “Now granted, there are some pins that have a higher value than others. But everything out there is available for trade.”

He also had to learn what to look for in pins.

“The main things we go after are the dated pins,” he said. “So it’s got to say ‘London 2012’ on it.”

Although he's become quite the pin trader, he insists it's still a hobby. In fact, he's a pin-trading purist.

"Unfortunately, there are some individuals who get a bunch of pins at these events and post them on eBay and take the profit," he said. "And I think that's wrong, but that's just my opinion."

### **Some trade to show others the ropes**

Federico García del Real is from Madrid, Spain, and has been pin trading for 20 years. In that time, he's traveled to three Olympic host cities: Vancouver, Beijing and now London.

This year, he invited his cousin, Danny García del Real, who's currently living in London, to come along. This is Danny's first time trading.

"It's my first Olympics, but I will go to more because I like it," Danny said.

The two said they can get 100 to 120 new pins on a good day. Federico estimated that he has 40,000 total.

In addition to showing Danny the ropes of pin trading, Federico said he loves pin trading because it gives him the opportunity to make new friends.

"I love traveling, so it's a really good way to meet other people," he said.

### **Some trade as a conversation starter**

Tom Hocutt from Albany, Ga., walked around outside Olympic Park sporting pins on his hat and making balloons for kids—dogs, swords, hats and flowers.

If someone approached him about trading pins, he said, "I'm not a serious pin trader, but I'm willing to trade pins."

This then gave him the opportunity to strike up a conversation about the organization for which he works, More Than Gold.

"More Than Gold is an organization of Christians that work together with the local churches wherever the Olympics are," he said. "We go to lots of other sporting events around the world to share what we believe about Jesus Christ."

He said giving people the chance to start the conversation is more effective than just walking up to people.



“That’s why we do the balloons, and that’s why we do the pins, so that people will approach us.”

More Than Gold even makes its own pins for each Olympic Games. This year’s pin has the organization’s name and a flame that’s made up of the Olympic ring colors. Each color represents something the organization believes, which was explained in a “mini-mag” Hocutt handed out to people.

“So we use that as a way to share the Gospel with people,” he said.

### **Some trade because they have a ‘collector mentality’**

Leonard Braun got into pin trading because of his daughter. She was a competitive swimmer, and some of her swim clubs had their own pins. He started trading a few of her extra pins and soon discovered Olympic sponsor pins.

He was hooked.

“Well, my daughter and I [traded] together,” he said. “So it was actually a lot more fun. She grew up, and I didn’t.”

Braun has attended the last three Winter Olympic Games and every Summer Games since the 1984 Games in Los Angeles, his hometown.

Once he reached 20,000 pins, he stopped counting. He said he’s not worried about the number of pins he gets.

“Like any hobby, sometimes when you start off, you tend to be a little compulsive,” he said. “But there’s so many pins now that it’s impossible to get everything. And whatever comes along, comes along, and that’s fine for me.”

One aspect of pin trading he enjoys is meeting new people. When he was in Athens for the 2004 Summer Olympic Games, he traded with a woman and later found out she was Queen Sofía of Spain.

“At the Olympics, everybody’s kind of equal, and you don’t know who you’re talking to necessarily,” he said.

When he trades, he wears a gold medal around his neck that says “100-Meter Freestyle Pin Trading.”

“It’s a sport I invented. That’s why I’m the world champion, because I don’t let anyone else compete.

"I've actually had a lot of fun with this because sometimes athletes will walk up to me because they think it might be real," he said. "And then when they read it, they laugh. And I always say, 'Don't laugh; my sport is just as hard as yours.'"

In the 28 years he's been trading, he said a lot has changed.

"It used to be that the International Olympic Committee kind of looked down their nose at what we do, but that changed a number of years ago," he said. "They actually recognize pin collecting and memorabilia collecting."

Although his daughter no longer has time for pin trading, his youngest grandson has started to develop an interest in pins.

"I think he's more interested in Disney pins than he is Olympic pins, though," he said.

But even if his family doesn't adopt his pin-trading tendencies, Braun says he plans to stick with his hobby as long as he can.

"If you don't collect, it's kind of hard to understand the collector mentality."



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